

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Overview

With the advent of a global economy, the truly challenging task of transforming the labor market into an increasingly more competitive entity lies ahead. In response to this task, educators must acquire an understanding of the questions and concerns that are posed by the current and foreseen changes in the workplace as we enter the twenty-first century (Feller & Walz, 1996; Reich, 1991). The next century will likely be characterized by social and economic transformations that will enhance worker uncertainty and distress, especially within the occupational domain for adolescents (Feller & Walz, 1996; Marshall & Tucker, 1992; Savickas, 1993).

Those students heading directly into the workforce from high school often need help with this transition. A troubling gap exists between the higher skill levels required in the new job market and the lower skills possessed by many new workforce entrants. "One of the weak links in the American system of human capital investment is the connection between school and work. In contrast to their peers abroad, American high school students frequently do not have good job skills..." (The Research and Policy Committee for Economic Development, 1990). The need for up-to-date occupational, academic, and employability skills as well as adaptability to changing workplace conditions and improved worker productivity, are made even more important by employers expectations of a high "return on their investment."

Shortages and turnover in certain labor markets have prompted employers to broaden the workforce pool by seeking out non-traditional personnel. Among these groups are people with

disabilities. To make full utilization of the talents and energies of people with disabilities, educators must continue to find ways that accommodate and support the efforts to bring our nation's hard-to-employ into the workforce.

Efforts to prepare students with disabilities for transition from school to adult life have at least a 30 year history (Halpern, 1992). Recently, transition planning and post-school employment for students with disabilities became a priority (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 1990, 1997). In the early 1990s, the first generation of youth with disabilities who had access to special education services for the entirety of their educational career (birth to age 21) graduated from high school. The transition of these students to adulthood provided an opportunity for a number of follow-up studies that examined how these graduates fared as young adults (Haring & Lovett, 1990; Scuccimarra & Speece, 1990).

Despite the widely acknowledged importance of the transition process, its successful manifestation remains a challenge. The ultimate goal of special education, the successful transition from school to the community, has only been marginally achieved throughout our country. The literature portrays a bleak picture of post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. It is apparent that students with disabilities fare no better in the workplace today than their counterparts did in previous decades (Benz & Halpern, 1993; Brolin & Gysbers, 1989; Chadsey-Rusch, Rusch, & O'Reilly, 1991; Wehmeyer, 1996). The occupational aspect of this group's education has been inadequate and sporadic.

Research findings indicate that individuals with disabilities are often unable to generalize traditional academics to the world of employment and adult living (Polloway, Patton, Epstein, & Smith, 1989). As a result, many adults with disabilities become "consumers of public resources rather than contributors to society" (Faas, D'Alonzo, & Stile, 1990, p. 1). This marginal

assimilation of students with disabilities into the mainstream of society occurred despite the frequent proclamation that "one of the most fundamental tenets of education is to develop to the maximum degree possible the abilities of **all** its students, so they can become employed, develop personal and social skills, and function as independent citizens" (Brolin & Gysbers, 1989, p. 155).

It is apparent practitioners must set new standards and goals for the transition of individuals with disabilities from secondary special education programs to adult vocational adjustment (Feagans, Merriwether, & Haldane, 1991). One way to gain a better understanding of how to work with youth to help them deal with changes in the 21st Century is to develop an understanding of career development and behavior in adolescents (Gysbers, 1996).

Career education for youth with disabilities is an especially critical issue. While nondisabled persons usually have a variety of postschool options, individuals with disabilities frequently do not. Specifically, the population of youth with learning disabilities has exhibited generally disappointing levels of both educational and occupational attainment (Haring, Lovett, & Smith, 1990; Miller, Snider, & Rzonca, 1990, Sitlington, Frank, & Carson, 1994; Wagner, Blackorby, Cameto, Hebbeler, & Newman, 1993). Job training programs for individuals with disabilities frequently prepare participants for low-level jobs that fit a constricted, stereotypic view of their abilities and characteristics (Heal, Copher, DeStefano, & Rusch, 1989). Despite an average level of intellectual functioning, youth with learning disabilities are more likely to be underemployed and concentrated in lower-prestige occupations in the sales, service, and managerial fields than their non-disabled peers (deBettencourt, Zigmond, & Thorton, 1989; Fourqurean, Meisgeir, Swank, & Williams, 1991).

Individuals with learning disabilities are also less likely to be enrolled in postsecondary education (Fairweather & Shaver, 1991). The National Longitudinal Transition Study (Wagner, 1992) revealed only 13.9% of youth with learning disabilities enrolled in college within two years after completing high school. This lower level of educational and occupational attainment of many youth with learning disabilities does not bode well for their long-term self-sufficiency. Perhaps, these individuals will “reach a ceiling in their progress toward independence” long before their counterparts (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996).

This portrait of postschool experiences for youth with learning disabilities underscores the need to collaborate with families who are committed to helping youth achieve their potential as adults. Considerable discussion has occurred among educators concerning families participation in their children’s education (Epstein, 1987, 1991), and the emphasis of the family's roles during career development and the transition process (Grotevant & Cooper, 1987; Nisbet, Covert, & Schuh, 1992; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986). This may be wise since "families are often the source of what young adults need to know" (Blalock & Patton, 1996, p. 2). However, little attention has been given to how aspects of the family, other than its structure, influence postschool vocational outcomes (Feagans, Merriwether, & Haldane, 1991; Saddler, 1996; Salembier & Furney, 1997; Schulenberg, Vondracek, & Crouter, 1984). For example, what people learn in families about work, or how specific family interactions influence work-related learning processes and outcomes, should be studied.

This gap in research addressing the relationship between family interaction and adolescent career development must be remedied if we are to meet the career education needs of students with disabilities (Brolin & Gysbers, 1989; Chadsey-Rusch, et al., 1991; Halpern, 1990; Johnson & Rusch, 1993). "The existing limitations [in research] affect not only the students as

they leave school but their families as well who remain responsible for their children's well-being and hopeful for their independence" (Blalock & Patton, 1996, p. 4).

The vocational development of youth with learning disabilities may best be examined within a life-span contextual framework. The "life-cycle" approach to vocational development, asserted by Super (1980, 1985), focused on the entire life-span and the interplay between the vital roles of individual, family member, and worker. Individual roles, values, and priorities shifted and were reassessed as a person progressed through the stages of vocational development (Herr, 1997; Super, 1985). Super (1980) conceptualized vocational development as occurring within and across four distinct environments: the home, the school, the workplace, and the community.

This attention to the impact of environment on vocational development was acknowledged by Bronfenbrenner (1979) in his ecological systems theory. Human development, and therefore vocational development, resulted from an individual influencing the contexts that influenced him or her. The activities, relationships, and roles that developed within a context (microsystems) and between contexts (mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems) helped to define the developing person. Bronfenbrenner's work suggested a conceptual framework within which developmental transitions, such as the move from school to work, could be investigated.

Examination of the contextual and ecological perspectives was useful for understanding how families influenced the vocational development of their members. These perspectives helped to broaden the understanding of the interrelatedness of the many factors that influenced an individual's vocational development. The family was viewed as the primary context for human development and it served to mediate influences from a variety of other sources (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Families, as facilitators of vocational exploration and development, have the power to

shape an individual's course of action and outcomes throughout their lifetime. The "family as educator" role recognized families as the context for the formation of the general and specific work attitudes, skills, and values related to vocational development.

Therefore, the following assumptions were made for this study: (a) the family plays a crucial role in the personal development of the individual, and (b) vocational development is an aspect of personal development and is subject to familial influences. These assumptions were based on research that identified the family as the primary context for human development. In fact, studies revealed that the family, particularly parents, were the primary influencers of their children's vocational development (Birk & Blimline, 1984; Bratcher, 1982; Hesser, 1984; Hotchkiss & Chiteji, 1981; Kotrlik & Harrison, 1989; Leichter, 1974; Naylor, 1986).

Statement of the Problem

Many youth are attempting to connect their working experiences into the broad array of roles within their particular familial, social, and cultural contexts. At the same time, the work roles of young adults seem to be characterized by increasingly challenging developmental tasks and increasingly complex social obstacles. The vast majority of youth with learning disabilities do not make the transition from high school to the workplace as successfully as their nondisabled peers, in part due to a lack of work-readiness skills.

One way to facilitate a positive transition experience into appropriate adult opportunities for youth with learning disabilities is to include the family in the process. However, the potential contributions family members can make to this important transition, and the value of including families in life/career development decisions have not been adequately studied. Therefore, this investigation focused on research questions pertaining to family contributions to and perceptions

of the work-readiness of youth with learning disabilities. More specifically, this research sought to identify:

1. What communications or behaviors do families engage in within the contexts of the home, school, workplace, and community that contribute to the work-readiness of youth with learning disabilities?
2. What value do these families place on their roles in the development of their youngsters' work-readiness?
 - a. What responsibilities do these families acknowledge in relation to the development of their child's work-readiness?
 - b. What perceptions do these families have concerning their own ability to enhance the work-readiness of their children?

The outcome of this research has the potential to impact the field of transition and to lend support to the development of a model of family contributions to work-readiness development in youth with learning disabilities.

Limitations

The following limitations were acknowledged:

1. The meaning derived from the interviews was, to some degree, a function of the participants' interaction with the interviewer (Ferrarotti, 1981; Geertz, 1973; Gelatt, 1989; Mishler, 1986; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Seidman (1991) explained:

... the fact is that interviewers are a part of the interviewing process. They ask questions, respond to the participant, and at times even share their own experiences. Moreover, interviewers work with the material, select from it, interpret, describe, and analyze it. Though they may be disciplined and dedicated to keeping the interviews as the participants' meaning-making process, interviewers are also a part of that process (p. 16).

2. The inherent heterogeneous nature of the population of individuals with learning disabilities may cause pertinent variables relevant to a small sector of the population to be overlooked (Rugel & Mitchell, 1977; Zetlin & Murtaugh, 1990). This heterogeneity may result from the use of "system-identified" students where numerous individuals and eligibility committees interpreted the federal definition of individuals with specific learning disabilities differently (Gresham & MacMillan, 1997; Oliver, Cole, & Hollingsworth, 1991; Toro, Weissberg, Guare, & Liebenstein, 1990).
3. The study examined the perspective of only one family member and, therefore, was limited in its description of the entire family's contribution.

Delimitations

The following limitations were imposed on this study by the researcher: (a) a purposeful sample of families of youth with learning disabilities was employed. Since the sample was not random, it could not be assumed that the results of the study were generalizable to the larger population; (b) the sample was confined to the population of the Commonwealth of Virginia; and (c) participation in the study was voluntary. Families who chose to participate may differ from those who chose not to participate. Finally, the issues described in the results of this study were limited by the content of the interview questions.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions help to operationalize the major terms used within this study:

Career - The culmination or totality of work accomplished in a lifetime (Brolin, 1977, p. 154).

Career Development - Self-development over the life-span through the integration of the roles, settings, and events of a person's life (Gysbers & Moore, 1975, p. 648).

Career Education - The totality of a student's life experiences, both vocational and avocational, not solely his or her occupational experiences (Brolin, 1983). Career education is a lifelong process that includes many settings (home, school, occupation, community) and roles (student, worker, consumer, citizen, family member).

Career Exploration - Encompassing those activities, directed toward enhancing knowledge of the self and the external environment, that an individual engages in to foster progress in career development (Blustein, 1992, p. 175).

Career Maturity - The ability to make independent and responsible career decisions based on the thoughtful integration of the best information about oneself and the occupational world (Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 1991, p. 8).

Disability - A physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of an individual's major life activities such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, working, and participating in community activities (The Americans with Disabilities Act, P. L. 101-336, 1990).

Family - Any ongoing social arrangement in which persons who care about and are committed to one another are able to have their basic psychological, social, physical, and economic needs met; cohabiting groups of some duration composed of persons in intimate relations based on biology, law, custom, or choice and usually economic interdependence (Zimmerman, 1992, p. 167).

Individualized Education Program (IEP) - A written statement drawn up by the teacher, parent and a school representative that must include: the student's present educational

level; annual goals, including short-term instructional objectives; the specific educational services to be provided and the extent to which the student will participate in regular education programs; initiation date and length of services; evaluation procedures; and a transition services statement for students by age 14 (Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997, P. L. 105-17).

Learning Disability - A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. Learning disabilities include such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Learning disabilities do not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; mental retardation; or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997, P. L. 105-17).

Perception - A keenness of insight, understanding, or intuition (Webster's College Dictionary, 1995, p.1001).

Transition - A coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities including postsecondary education, vocational training and education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the

student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997, P. L. 105-17).

Vocational Development - A dynamic, stage-based, evolving process that integrates all the aspects of an individual's life into an understanding of the individual's interaction with his/her vocation (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1981, p. 73).

Work Readiness - To have the attitudinal, problem-solving, and interpersonal behaviors thought to be critical for student success both in classroom settings and in employment situations; behaviors which will contribute to eventual success in the world of work (Sarkees-Wircenski & Scott, 1995, p. 732).

Summary

While it has been widely recognized that the transition outcomes of individuals with learning disabilities have been less than stellar, research regarding the crucial role the family plays in developing work-readiness skills has been far from comprehensive. A need exists for further research on the school-to-work transition of individuals with learning disabilities to understand their career development and the factors that mediate it, such as family behaviors, attitudes, and interactions. Can the family, as the primary context for overall growth and development, be utilized to enhance career development, specifically work-readiness? This question, together with the discouraging vocational outcomes for young adults with learning

disabilities, led the researcher to propose this study in which the family's contributions to the work-readiness of youth with learning disabilities are investigated.

This document is organized so that Chapter One provides an overview of the study, problem statement, limitations, delimitations, and definitions pertinent to this area of study. Chapter Two provides a synthesis of literature on related topics and a theoretical framework for understanding the context of the study. Chapter Three describes the methodology of the study in detail. Chapter Four contains the findings of the study, including identification of predominant and underlying themes that emerged from analysis of the text. The final chapter summarizes the study, discusses the conclusions, and presents implications for practitioners and for future research.

Chapter Two

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides a comprehensive synthesis of related literature and a theoretical framework for understanding the issues that are critical for conceptualizing this study. More specifically, research was organized in four parts: the problem, what is known, the gap, and the theoretical base.

The Problem

The Changing Workplace

The American workplace of the 20th century has been dominated by the mass-production, cost-saving system, developed under the assumption that products, services, production systems, and technologies rarely changed. This assumption no longer holds true. In today's American workplace, the low-skill, high-control system has been replaced by a system more responsive, adaptable, and conducive to constant innovation (Law, Knuth, & Bergman, 1992), and characterized by the decentralization of authority and responsibility. In response, the modern-day American worker is required to participate directly in the decision-making process at all levels of production. Workers must now continue to produce while investigating problems and implementing their own solutions (U. S. Department of Defense, 1992).

Employers are looking for workers who are educationally prepared to meet the needs and demands of today's information-age workplace and the global marketplace. This shift from a mass-production workplace to an information-age workplace emphasizes the need for workers with high level technical skills, critical thinking skills, individual initiative, and more education. New skills are required in the workplace to keep up with the rapid pace of change in technological developments and applications, along with new management styles (Bailey, 1990).

That the nature of work is evolving rapidly is no doubt becoming obvious to American workers and employers (Marshall & Tucker, 1992; Reich, 1991).

The majority of high school students entering the workforce and postsecondary education lack the skills necessary for effective participation in many careers (Hernandez-Gantes & Phelps, 1995). What are the necessary skills for vocational success? Using a modified Delphi technique, Uchida, Cetron, & McKenzie (1996) asked 55 education, business, and government leaders to name the most important knowledge, skills, and behaviors that K-12 students needed to know to prosper in the twenty-first century. Ten academic skills were noted including: (a) writing and communicating effectively; (b) understanding reading; (c) using math, logic, and reasoning skills, and understanding statistics; (d) applying science; (e) effectively accessing and processing information using technology; (f) conducting research and interpreting and applying the data; (g) knowing enough American history and government to function in a democratic society; (h) understanding world history and world affairs; (i) knowing world geography; and (j) knowing a foreign language.

Seven personal and interpersonal skills were deemed essential for future success including: (a) oral and written communication skills; (b) critical thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving skills; (c) self-discipline and the ability to act responsibly; (d) adaptability and flexibility; (e) interpersonal skills, including speaking, listening, and the ability to be part of a team; (f) respect for the value of effort and work; and (g) goal setting for life-long learning.

The leaders indicated five civil skills and abilities critical in the future: (a) multicultural understanding and an international perspective; (b) conflict resolution and negotiation skills; (c) understanding and practicing honesty, integrity, and the “golden rule,” (d) an appreciation of diversity; and (e) the ability to take increased responsibility for one’s own actions.

The increasing diversity in America's student population and future workforce is also posing new challenges to both employers and vocational educators. The fast changing nature of diversity presents enormous implications for preparing productive individuals who need to adapt to the high performance demands of today's workplace (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989). The

composition of the workforce has changed dramatically in recent years. A diverse workforce made up of primarily women, minorities, and immigrants is expected by the year 2000. In fact, Hodgkinson (1988) predicted by the year 2000, 83% of the new entrants into the American workforce will belong to at least one of these three groups. Almost two-thirds of the new entrants into the workforce by the year 2000 will be women, and 29% will be non-white (Johnson & Packer, 1987; Kutscher, 1987). Workers with disabilities are also among the previously underrepresented groups who are entering the labor force in increasing numbers.

Why is this diversification a concern? Hodgkinson (1988) explained how certain groups have typically been underserved by the American public school system and that this lack of educational preparation may have profound implications for the future workplace. “Unless and until all students have access to the kind of education that historically has been available only to a small percentage, they will enter the workforce ill prepared” (Law, et al., 1992, p. 2). Midock (1994) indicated that the world of work can become a complex and hostile environment for workers who enter without specific skills. In response, schools must address the need to prepare all students with highly-developed skills for the modern, rapidly-evolving workplace environment. Educators must also find ways to facilitate the transition of youth from school to the workplace that enhance their employment opportunities and outcomes.

Adolescents and Work

In light of the concerns about entry-level worker performance, it is important to examine the role and value of work in adolescents’ lives. Research examined the positive and negative correlates of adolescent work and found that concurrent costs and gains depended on the dimensions of work as well as adolescent characteristics (Mael, Morath, & McLellan, 1997). In defense of adolescent work, researchers reported that adolescent employment built character and self-reliance (Stephens, 1979; Wildavsky, 1989), allowed for a smoother integration into the adult work world, promoted higher work orientation (Mael, et al., 1997; Stone, Stern, Hopkins,

& McMillion, 1990), and expanded and extended opportunities to develop healthy career identities (Gysbers, 1996).

Work experience benefited students by helping them (a) become more employable by learning to learn on-the-job, (b) stay in school longer by motivating them and providing income, and (c) better understand the intellectual content of academic subjects by making it more meaningful and relevant. In addition, work was found to be associated with punctuality, dependability, a sense of personal responsibility, and high motivation to perform work well (Stone, et al., 1990). Adolescents increased their ability to estimate the reality of their interests, aptitudes, and values through experiences at work (O'Hara & Tiedeman, 1959).

Criticisms of adolescent work included the negative effects on high school grades, homework completion, classroom involvement, school conduct, and participation in extramural school activities (Bachman & Schulenberg, 1993; Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986; Mortimer & Finch, 1986; Steinberg & Dornbusch, 1991). Additionally, most adolescent jobs required only low level skills, with over 50% occurring in food service and retail sales (Kablaoui & Paulter, 1991). Steinberg (1982) concluded the problem with the type of work performed by youth was that it did not demand a great deal cognitively, strengthen the work ethic, or lead to future employment. The often monotonous and unchallenging nature of much teenage work created such negative attitudes toward work as materialism, cynicism, and tolerance for unethical practices (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986). Perhaps, if youth found meaningful or engrossing jobs, they would not become as "turned off" to work. Work generally involving more autonomy, decision-making opportunities, and connection with personal interests and talents, would be indicative of the potential benefits of a good job. Youth truly adapt to society when concrete, well-defined work experiences reconcile with reality. They must consider their work role as a natural extension of themselves and their concurrent social roles.

Researchers addressed how lack of work affected adolescent development for those adolescents who have already left school. Youth without jobs that provided a sense of purpose and validation, missed out on a sense of belonging, security, and personal effectiveness. In

addition, limited exposure to adequate work role models resulted in “knowledge or behavioral vacuums in young people because they form opinions, adopt values, and make decisions ... resulting in premature educational and occupational foreclosure” (Gysbers, 1996, p. 95).

Adolescents face a transition from school to work that is increasingly demanding and requires adaptive personal attributes in conjunction with supportive educational and vocational environments. In response, more attention needs to be directed to adolescent populations who are bound for immediate employment; to those who have stronger occupational skills than educational achievements; and to those whose employment history and probable future is unpredictable and intermittent (Herr, 1997).

Transition from School to the Workplace

In the early 1980s a new term, transition, was introduced by Madeline Will, then Assistant Secretary of the U. S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). Transition, "an outcome-oriented process encompassing a broad array of services and experiences that lead to employment" (Will, 1984, p. 2) was coined. Over time, transition was seen to encompass more than the movement from school to a particular job, outcomes were viewed in terms of economic self-sufficiency, not only as an individual's ability to access an entry-level job (Neubert, Tilson, & Ianacone, 1989).

Providing support for students as they make the transition to work has been advocated for over 10 years (Halpern, 1985, 1992; Rusch & Mithaug, 1985). In fact, the need for organized transitional services for individuals with mild disabilities has been thoroughly documented (Hasazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985; Hernandez-Gantes & Phelps, 1995; Mithaug, Horiuchi, & Fanning, 1985).

A common assumption in delivering services to mildly disabled individuals is that this population is able to move from school to work with greater ease than their more severely disabled counterparts (Rusch & Phelps, 1987), however, there is little empirical research to

support this assumption (Neubert, et al., 1989). Rosenthal (1989) examined the transition experience of two and four year college students with learning disabilities. Four basic premises reflecting the need for transitional support emerged. They were: (a) career maturity is a process that presents unique difficulties for persons with learning disabilities; (b) external resources beyond the school setting are needed to facilitate career development and job placement support services; (c) persons with learning disabilities who have a "hidden handicap" need proactive efforts to help them overcome both hidden and overt barriers to their employment; and (d) experience-based education is needed to meet the motivational and career needs of persons with learning disabilities.

It is equally imperative to identify and validate support strategies that functionally relate to favorable student outcomes. Support strategies include any assistance provided directly to a student to facilitate a successful transition from school to adult roles. Kohler's (1993) review of the best strategies in transition suggested that there was limited empirical evidence to support a relationship between current transition practices and favorable postschool outcomes. After a comprehensive analysis of the literature, she identified four transition processes that were supported by empirical evidence including vocational training, parent involvement, paid work experiences during high school, and social skills training.

Hughes, Hwang, Kim, Killian, Harmer, and Alcantara (1997) identified multiple strategies that supported students in the transition to adult life. This study found 10 empirically validated transition support strategies including: (a) teaching the student social behaviors that facilitate interactions, (b) teaching the student self-management skills that will enable him or her to perform expected behaviors with greater independence, (c) identifying areas in which student performance is not consistent with expectations, (d) identifying student expectations, choices, and preferences with respect to daily living, (e) teaching the student's choice making and decision-making skills, (f) identifying naturally occurring cues in the student's workplace and other environments that will support him or her in initiating and completing experienced and desired behavior, (g) teaching the student skills that are necessary to make choices and decisions

and to express preferences and provide opportunities to exercise choice, (h) identifying co-worker, peer, and family support matching student needs, (i) identifying independence objectives, and (j) assessing and monitoring social acceptance across time. Other critical factors empirically demonstrated to support successful student outcomes included a network of family and friends (Hasazi, et al., 1985), community-based instruction (McDonnell, Hardman, Hightower, Keifer-O'Donnell, & Drew, 1993), and participation in accelerated academic courses (Masino & Hodapp, 1996).

The transition from school to the workplace is often not a smooth one for American youth (Barton, 1991). The United States General Accounting Office (1991) reported that approximately half of the youth in America did not go on to college and, in turn, received little assistance in making the transition from school to employment. In fact, most of these individuals spent a number of years after leaving high school moving from one job to the next. The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLS-Y) found that between the ages of 18 and 27, the high school graduate not enrolled in a postsecondary educational program held approximately six different jobs and experienced unemployment four to five times (U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1993). As of 1993, job instability and short-term job tenure among American youth remained “exceptionally high” compared to their European counterparts (Riding, 1993). Moreover, many individuals had not found stable employment by the age of 40 (Stern, Finkelstein, Stone, Latting, & Dornsife, 1994).

The unemployment rate among teenagers has been consistently high (above 15%) since the mid-1980s. In 1993, unemployment rates among 18- and 19-year old high school graduates were 19% nationally as compared to the 5.7% rate for those 25- to 54-years old (U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1993). Siegel and Gaylord-Ross (1991) reported that one of the major obstacles to career success for most teenagers was the failure to meet the demands of the world of work. In the modern labor market, basic skills are the key safeguards for entering employment, and serve not only as protectors against the risk of early and continuing unemployment, but as essential elements in the formation of adult occupational

identity. Poorly developed basic skills can lead to problems with acquiring more specific, work-related skills, and may impede the process of occupational identity formation by stifling aspirations and forcing a commitment to limited occupational possibilities (Bynner, 1997).

Concerns have also been voiced about whether youth are adequately prepared to fill the new highly technical jobs replacing the traditional manufacturing jobs (Johnston & Packer, 1987). Employers turned down approximately 87% of teenagers who applied for a job because they did not meet the basic job qualifications (Harris Poll, 1991).

In a survey conducted by the Gallup Organization for the National Career Development Association (1993), American adults across the nation were asked how well high schools were doing in preparing individuals for the world of work. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents felt that high schools had not done enough to help non-college-bound students develop job skills, find jobs, plan careers, and use career and labor market information. "Education and work remain two separate worlds, bridged only by the youth themselves; whatever benefit could be derived from a more planned and collaborative effort remains an opportunity unrealized" (Sarkees-Wircenski & Scott, 1995, p. 621).

Workers with Disabilities

Siegel and Gaylord-Ross (1991) reported the employment of persons with disabilities as one of the most compelling social problems in our society. As of 1994, persons with disabilities continued to have extraordinarily high unemployment rates of approximately 70%. According to the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), between 1991 and 1994, the number of Americans with disabilities aged 21 to 64 who were employed increased by more than 1.1 million. This contradicts other findings that the proportion of Americans with disabilities, ages 16 to 64, who were employed fell from 33% in 1986 to 31% in 1994 (Louis Harris & Associates / National Organization on Disability, 1994). Regardless, the level of unemployment among the disabled remains exceptionally high.

These high unemployment rates have often been attributed to skill deficits of the applicants and negative attitudes of the employers (Millington, McCarthy, & Strohmer, 1996). On-the-job task-related difficulties encompassed the inability to perform assigned job tasks, inadequate production rate, difficulty following directions, poor attendance and punctuality, personal adjustment problems, social and interpersonal adjustment problems, and poor health (Neubert, et al., 1989). Individuals who lacked work skills and behaviors or possessed a poor awareness of their importance were likely to encounter the most difficulty in getting and retaining employment skills.

Unfortunately the relative effect of issues, barriers, and opportunities occurring during the career-development life span of individuals with disabilities are often neglected. Not only do persons with disabilities have to face the consequences of the changing workplace, they must continue to struggle for equal recognition and treatment among the ranks of the workforce (Millington, McCarthy, & Strohmer, 1996). Many individuals with disabilities face obstacles that influence opportunities for educational attainment, achievement, economic self-sufficiency, and independent living. The obstacles faced can be environmental, emotional, social, psychological, physical, or academic (McDaniels & Gysbers, 1992). For example, high school graduates with disabilities participated in postsecondary programs at only one quarter the rate of their peers without disabilities. Moreover, people with disabilities make up 8.6% of the population but represent 21.9% of persons at or below the poverty level (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1994).

Societal ignorance and stereotypes about individuals with disabilities were also identified as serious deterrents to their successful career development and employment (Brolin & Gysbers, 1989). Misconceptions about persons with disabilities and prejudices toward them in the work world abound; for example, they may be seen as stupid, lazy, or crazy, or as burdens to any organization that hires them (Rosenthal, 1989). The work world needs to see firsthand the abilities, as well as specific limitations of persons with disabilities, promoting both an emphatic and informed stance in seeking and providing employment for them.

Youth with Learning Disabilities

Black (1997) reported that over the past five years, the number of American students in special education had grown from 4.8 million in 1992 to 5.4 million in 1997. Approximately 2.4 million of those students were classified as learning disabled. The incidence rates for learning disabilities ranged from an estimated 5% to more than 15% of the entire population. Learning disability has become the largest single category of disability (Palincsar, 1997).

A learning disability is a disorder of one or more of the basic psychological processes. Problems of learning disabilities are pervasive in many areas of functioning including listening, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, math, visual perception, auditory perception, coordination, attention span, cognitive processing problems, and memory difficulties (Gerber, Schnieders, Paradise, Reiff, Ginsberg, & Popp, 1990; Hoffman, Sheldon, Minskoff, Sautter, Steidle, Baker, Bailey, & Echols, 1987).

Some characteristics of youth with learning disabilities may specifically interfere with future vocational productivity. Any area of work competence and/or work personality can be adversely affected by a learning disability. The process of vocational development within an individual involves the emergence of three successively developing interactive domains: developing a work personality (self-image as a worker, and motivation to work), developing work competencies (work habits, physical and mental skills, interpersonal skills), and developing appropriate, crystallized work goals (Rehm & Reagor, 1993). The third domain is affected by the impact the learning disability has had on the other two domains.

Behaviors and deficits that typically interfered with the developing vocational domains included impulsivity, hyperactivity, clumsiness, difficulties in problem solving, short attention span, motor problems (Gillett, 1980); inability to follow oral directions; difficulty with organization (Rosenthal, 1989); low personal self-esteem (Gordon, 1984; Savickas, 1997a); passive learning (Alley, Deschler, Clark, Schumaker, & Warner, 1983); vocational identity problems and "learned helplessness" (Rosenthal, 1989); less tolerance for frustration, less

adaptive assertiveness, classroom behavior problems, and less personal and social competence (Toro, et al., 1990); and impaired academic self-concepts (Chapman, 1988; Grolnick & Ryan, 1990; Krutilla & Benson, 1990; Prout, Marcal, & Marcal, 1992; Resnick, 1987).

Youth with learning disabilities have a disability that not only limits them in school, but may also limit them vocationally (Gillett, 1980). They frequently exhibit difficulties accurately observing and effectively imitating the work habits of role models, both within and outside the family (Kronick, 1981); processing work-related information correctly (Rosenthal, 1989; Zinkus, 1979); making career-related decisions (Rosenthal, 1989); developing work-related skills (Savickas, 1997a); and engaging in exploratory activities that can enhance knowledge about the world of work (Alley, et al., 1983). These deficits may affect the individual's worker-image, motivation to work, and career goal development (Hershenson, 1984). Major vocational needs must be addressed if they are to attain adult competence (Hoffman, et al., 1987).

The impact of chronic and persistent academic and social difficulties on the overall adjustment of the young adults, may also interfere with vocational success in adulthood. For youth with learning disabilities, the various interactions and activities that facilitate career maturity are complicated by several factors specifically related to their disabilities. They have had less success with school related tasks than those without learning disabilities. If achievement in school is the precursor of achievement in the wider community, then it might be questioned whether youth with learning disabilities have incorporated attitudes about themselves that are reflective of their unsuccessful experiences with school (Bingham, 1978).

The difficulties confronting youth with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining competitive employment received substantial attention in the literature in the past decade. Many studies examined factors related to the unemployment, underemployment, and poor job performance of youth and adults with learning disabilities. Identified factors related to unemployment included career naiveté and /or career immaturity; insufficient or nonexistent career/vocational planning; barriers to postsecondary training opportunities; little help from schools or adult agencies with the job search process; limited social networks of informal sources

for job leads; difficulty filling out job applications, knowing where to go to find a job, knowing how to get job training, participating in job interviews, and high job turnover rates (Halpern, Doren, & Benz, 1993; Kracke, 1997; Rist, 1983).

Factors associated with underemployment were erratic employment history; occupational stereotyping, training for and placement in a limited variety of occupational environments (Gillet, 1980); inadequate vocational instruction or school-related work experiences (Benz & Halpern, 1993); poor attendance at colleges and postsecondary vocational schools (Wagner, Blackorby, Cameto, Hebbeler, & Newman, 1993); and opportunities restricted to primarily unskilled, blue-collar jobs with limited prospects for large wage gains, career advancement, job security, or a means to live independently (D'Amico & Marder, 1991). Those factors associated with poor job performance were: inadequate attention to social, vocational, and interpersonal skills development as they pertained to independent living and adulthood; poor reality testing and unrealistic expectations; an inability to develop a generalized concept of self and their vocational roles over a life span; not following directions; not having enough time to learn job skill; poor job maintenance skills; inaccurate assessments of stressful situations; and the inability to work out alternative solutions to problems (Hoffman, et al., 1987; Huntington & Bender, 1993; Rosenthal, 1989).

Reisner and Balasubramaniam (1989) identified the following problems confronting youth with disabilities in their quest to transition into the labor market: (a) lack of information about jobs and careers, (b) too few role models in good jobs, (c) lack of attitudes and skills needed in the workplace, (d) inadequate access to high-quality vocational education programs, (e) negative perceptions and attitudes of potential employers, and (f) poor labor market conditions for youth.

Because of these numerous limitations, career education and planning for youth with learning disabilities must be carefully programmed with nothing left to chance. To be vocationally successful, youth with learning disabilities need education, training, and employment suited to their disabilities and abilities. Educators must recognize the role other

stakeholders, such as families, can play in the development of successful workers with learning disabilities.

What is Known

Family Role in Career Development

Family Involvement in Schooling

Citing more than 85 studies, Henderson & Berla (1995) documented the profound and comprehensive benefits for students, families, and schools, when parents and family members became participants in their children's educational lives. "The evidence is now beyond dispute. When parents are involved in their child's education at home, their children do better in school" (Henderson & Berla, 1995, p.10). When parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of the socio-economic status, ethnic/racial background, or parents' education. In fact, the more extensive the parent involvement, the higher the student achievement level (National Parent Teacher Association, 1996). Family involvement has been positively associated with higher grades and test scores, better attendance, consistent homework completion, more positive attitudes and behavior, higher graduation rates, increased enrollment rates in post-secondary education, decreased use of alcohol and participation in anti-social behavior, maintaining a high quality of classwork, and developing realistic plans for the future (National Parent Teacher Association, 1996). The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student's family is able to "(a) create a home environment that encourages learning, (b) communicate high, yet reasonable, expectations for their children's achievement and future careers, and (c) become involved in their children's education at school and in the community" (National Parent Teacher Association, 1996, p. 8).

In the past decade, research placed a renewed emphasis on the family as the context for human, and therefore, career development (Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander, & Palladino, 1991; Gecas & Self, 1990; Grotevant & Cooper, 1987; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986; Vondracek, 1993; Young, 1994). It was discovered that families played a highly significant role in influencing the vocational plans and accomplishments of their children (Goldstein & Oldham, 1979; Kanter, 1977; Kohn, 1977; Otto & Call, 1985). Numerous benefits were associated with family participation, including the development of professional relationships, attainment of positive educational outcomes for students (Epstein, 1987; Salembier & Furney, 1997), and student enrollment in postsecondary vocational and academic programs (Newman & Cameto, 1993). Continued participation of families in the schooling of their children provided for ongoing opportunities to assess student abilities and progress toward specified postschool goals (Gajar, Goodman, & McAfee, 1993). Parents had the greatest amount of available information on the skills, interests, needs, and desires of their sons and daughters (Hasazi, Collins, & Cobb, 1988). A study conducted by Kracke (1997) revealed that 86.5% of students credited their parents for assistance in making career decisions and helping them get their first job (65.2%).

Family Perspective of Roles and Responsibilities

While the link between parents' intentions and the actions they undertake with their children is not a direct, causal connection, they can be viewed as one way that parents communicate vocational information and advice to youth (Young & Friesen, 1992). Parents engaged purposefully in their interactions with their children, and their "actions [were] guided by mentally represented intentions" (Heckhausen & Beckman, 1990, p. 36).

Research was conducted examining the intentional goal-directed action of parents in influencing the career development of their children (Brandtstadler, 1984; Rehm & Reagor, 1993; Young, 1994; Young & Friesen, 1992; Young, Friesen, & Pearson, 1988). Young & Friesen (1992) interviewed 207 parents to find out how they wanted to influence the career

development of their child. Then, parents recounted specific influential incidents they felt had impacted their child in the area of career development. Results indicated that the parent's frame of reference for engaging in the events was that the young person may benefit from the activity in some definite way. The content of the intentions also revealed that parents attempted to influence the development of a wide range of skills and attitudes in their adolescent children. Many parents reverted to more general principles of human development as guides to career influence because they were concerned about not knowing specific vocational, educational, and occupational information. Parents believed that they could lay a suitable groundwork for the career development of their children by broadly influencing them to become responsible and capable human beings (Young & Friesen, 1992).

Family members' perspectives on their role in vocational guidance revealed efforts to influence their children's career futures through various vocational guidance strategies including: talking to them about their future; encouraging them in their efforts; teaching them appropriate attitudes; instilling certain personal characteristics (responsibility, punctuality, getting along with others); keeping them in school; talking about their own positive and negative job experiences; making suggestions; requiring home chores; and warning them not to follow in their parents' footsteps (Rehm & Reagor, 1993; Young, Friesen, & Pearson, 1988). Some parents, on the other hand, viewed the career education of their children as the responsibility of the school, not the home (Roessler, Brodin, & Johnson, 1992).

Family Perceptions of Work Skills Needed

What qualities and skills do families think their adolescent children need for success at work? In a 1996 study conducted by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), parents were asked what skills were "absolutely essential" for success in the twenty-first century. Three of the most common responses were directly related to career development. Seventy-nine percent of the parents questioned indicated "good work habits" (being on time,

self-discipline, etc.) as being absolutely essential; 77% believed knowing the “value of hard work” was critical; while “practical job skills for office or industry” was deemed very important by 55% of the respondents (Uchida, et al., 1996).

Research conducted over the past two decades revealed that parents felt their children would need qualities such as positive attitudes, common sense, dependability, responsibility, honesty, loyalty, and punctuality to succeed in the workforce. Parents also indicated specific behaviors and skills such as computer knowledge, following orders, respecting bosses, getting along with people, appropriate social skills, independent living skills, and academic skills were needed in order to obtain and maintain secure, well-paying, white collar work (Heal, et al., 1989; Heal & Rusch, 1995; Kohn, 1977; Ogbu, 1979; Rehm & Reagor, 1993). On-the-job training that included work-based and school-based learning was seen as enhancing employment opportunities (D'Amico & Marder, 1991; Goldberg, McLean, LaVigne, Fratolilo, & Sullivan, 1990) and improving employment-related skills and behaviors (Kohler, 1994).

The Early Years

Career development begins in the work routines of childhood and the child's observation and imitation of the work roles of various family members (Rosenthal, 1989). Attitudes toward occupations form early in life and self-concepts which are fundamental to educational and vocational planning begin to form in early childhood, since "the vast majority of development in children's work orientation is well underway before the end of the elementary years" (Goldstein & Oldham, 1979, p. 180). Children experience vocational development as they learn about themselves and their abilities, as they conceptualize different work, and as they become involved in activities that stimulate these concepts (Kruboltz, 1979; Super 1957, 1963, 1980, 1981). Evidence of the vocational development process is manifest in the child's growing knowledge of work and specific work activities, knowledge of self, identification with work, and the ability to engage in work activities (Burgoyne, 1979; Kidd, 1984; Wijting, Arnold, & Conrad, 1977).

Educational institutions are not the only source of learning related to occupational preparation. Family interaction, communication, and behavior about careers and work can greatly influence the attitudes and behaviors of young people as they learn about work and work experiences. In fact, family attitudes about school and work, educational and career goals, and values can have a long-term impact on a youth's career decisions (Lankard, 1995).

Family and Transition

Reasons exist for involving families in transition planning for youth with disabilities. First, youth and their families are those whose lives are most impacted by transition-focused education and services (Wehman, 1992). Second, they represent the one constant source of support, a sustaining factor, throughout a young person's childhood and into early adulthood (Kohler, 1998; Steere, Pancsofar, Wood, & Hecimovic, 1990).

Kohler (1998) identified effective transition-focused family practices and described specific roles for family members. Family members were responsible for: teaching rights and responsibilities, leisure skills, independent living skills, and self-determination; taking initiative in the planning process; addressing medical and guardianship issues during the planning process, providing assessment information; participating in policy and procedure development, participating in family support networks and family training programs; exercising decision making; participating in resource allocation decisions, strategic planning, and program evaluation; and providing information for student follow-up. Parent participation in transition planning prepared them to assume new roles that they were likely to encounter as youth made the transition into adulthood and maneuvered through the complexities of the adult world (Szymanski, 1994).

Grimstad and Way (1993) identified three domains that described the role of the family in vocational development. The domains suggested that the family "nurtures the development of

(a) general employability skills and values, (b) occupationally specific skills and values for paid employment, and (c) occupationally specific skills and values for the work of the family” (p. 49).

Since parental responsibility and investment in offspring are not confined to a single period in their children's lives nor limited to a narrow array of activities (Young, 1994), parents must become career educators and advocates for their adolescents with disabilities both during the school years and after graduation.

Family Behavior Promoting Work Skills

Aspects of family and parental behavior described in the literature as promoting adolescents' work competence, career exploration, and transition-focused education are: an authoritative parenting style; parental openness to adolescents' issues; individuated, child-centered, and reciprocal parent-youth relationships; parental support of active occupational exploration and preparation; encouraging student self-determination and independence at home; teaching and giving responsibility for daily living and personal-social goals; assisting the student in developing personal and social values; self-confidence and self-esteem; reinforcing work-related behaviors and providing advice and counsel within intentional discussions about careers (Clark & Kolstoe, 1995; Kracke, 1997; Sebald, 1986; Wilks, 1985; Young & Friesen, 1992; Young, Valach, Paselulkho, Dover, Matthes, Paproski, & Sankey, 1997). These activities and discussions related to career issues and their task orientation allowed for the development of a stronger family relationship while simultaneously serving as a facilitating factor in career development.

Young, Friesen, & Dillaboughy (1991) suggested that parents framed the domain of parental influence of career development using five constructs: “(a) open communication between parents and young people, (b) the development of responsibility, (c) the active

involvement of parents in the lives of young people, (d) the encouragement of autonomy, and (e) specific direction and guidance” (p. 198). These constructions were not necessarily mutually exclusive, yet they did represent different ways in which parents think about the reality of the help they could provide.

Family Variables Influencing Career Development

According to Super (1957), family-related variables can be divided into an objective-subjective classification. Objective family variables were studied over the years, and often provided the basis from which a youth’s career planning and decision making evolved (Lankard, 1995). Family variables found to influence the career development, occupational aspiration and attainment, and the range of vocational choices considered by youth included the parents’ socioeconomic status (Holland, 1981; Preston, 1984; Way & Rossmann, 1996), parents’ level of education (Penick & Jepsen, 1992), parent occupation (Sewell & Hauser, 1976), family configuration (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Burge, 1991; Furstenburg, 1990; Rosenthal, 1979; Zajonc & Markus, 1975), race (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Gansemer, 1977; Grotevant & Cooper, 1987), geographic location (Hesser, 1984; Kuczynski, 1981; Martin, 1981) social class (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Goldberg, 1992) maternal employment (Smith, 1981), and perceived parental influence (O’Neil, Ohelde, Tollefson, Barke, Piggott, & Watts, 1980).

Subjective family variables such as family structure, social context, and family process orientation were shown to “influence specific vocational outcomes in predictable ways” (Schulenberg, et al., 1984, p. 138). Family process factors found to be associated with career development included occupational aspirations of parents for their children (Rojewski, 1995), transmission of family work values (Kohn, 1977; Mortimer, Lorence, & Kumka, 1986; Way & Rossmann, 1996), planned parent interventions and interactions concerning careers and work (Young, 1994; Young & Friesen, 1992), family interaction style (Berryman & Bailey, 1992; Penick & Jepsen, 1992), family functioning patterns (Bloom, 1985; Way & Rossmann, 1996),

cultural expectations (Tien & Lin, 1994), and family participation in children's schooling (Epstein, 1987, 1991).

Specific features of the family (i.e. location in the broader social context, structural features, and process-oriented features) do influence the career development process and specific vocational outcomes in predictable ways (Blustein, et al., 1991; Kinnier, Brigman, & Noble, 1990; Penick & Jepsen, 1992; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994a; Super, 1957). The family's influence on vocational development operates along two interdependent dimensions: first, specific opportunities provided by the family for the developing individual, and second, socialization practices and parent-child relationships. The family is one context in which vocational development occurs.

While objective variables have been studied extensively, it is particularly relevant to study the subjective family variables affecting the transition of youth from school to work. Studies of individual families showed:

What the family does is more important to student success than family education or income. This is true whether the family is rich or poor, whether the parents finished high school or not, or whether the child is in preschool or in the upper grades (U. S. Department of Education, 1994, p. 1).

If subjective family variables do influence vocational outcomes in predictable ways, it is important for researchers to gather relevant data on how to use these factors to develop work readiness and facilitate transition.

Work Readiness

Work-readiness has been described as “the individual’s readiness to deal with the vocational tasks of his [or her] life stage” (Jordaan & Heyde, 1979, p. 3). To be “work ready” means an individual has the attitudinal, problem-solving, and interpersonal behaviors thought to be critical for success both in classroom settings and in employment situations (Sarkees-Wircenski & Scott, 1995). In other words, how ready are youth to make the educational and vocational decisions and perform the kinds of educational and vocational tasks (behaviors) that are expected by schools and the world of work?

Work-readiness has been measured in numerous ways including the examination of an individual’s career maturity (Gelatt, 1989; Herr & Cramer, 1992; Super, 1985; Way & Rossmann, 1996), vocational identity (Holland, Daiger, & Power, 1985), career indecision (Osipow, Carney, Winer, Yanico, & Koschier, 1980; Super, 1957), occupational aspirations (Hershenson, 1984; Lent & Hackett, 1987; Rojewski, 1995), world-of-work knowledge (Super, 1957), self-knowledge (Super, 1957), decision-making skills (Hagner & Salomone, 1989; Super, 1957), work effectiveness skills (Way & Rossmann, 1996), vocational choices (O’Hara & Tiedeman, 1959), self-concept (Super, 1985), and future goals planning (Gribbons & Lohnes, 1965, 1966; Norusis, 1990; Way & Rossmann, 1996). Self-determination or self-advocacy was also determined to be a necessary work readiness skill for youth with disabilities (Mithaug, 1994; Patton & Blalock, 1996; Ward, 1991; Wehmeyer, 1996).

A number of national taxonomies identified generic workplace readiness skills and knowledge. The 1991 Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) identified two levels of skills, foundation skills and workplace competencies, young people entering the world of work would need in order to succeed. The Commission outlined a three-part foundation consisting of basic skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities. A high performance workplace would require five additional workplace competencies in the areas of resources, interpersonal skills, information, understanding and using systems and technology.

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) (1995), through its Workplace Readiness Assessment Consortium, developed a framework for assessing workplace readiness skills. This framework included areas such as personal management, participation in work organizations, thinking and problem solving, communication, and workplace systems.

Goals 2000 encouraged broad educational reform and included a number of provisions affecting the assessment of workplace readiness. Content standards were used to develop links between academic standards and workplace readiness standards. The National Skills Standards Board, established by Goals 2000, will determine which standards to adopt.

Several studies were conducted that provided a basis for the skills needed by the workforce of the future. Studies conducted by Carnevale (1991) and Carnevale, Gainer and Meltzer (1989) identified sixteen job skills crucial to success. These skills were divided between seven categories: (a) learning to learn, (b) academic basics, (c) communications, (d) adaptability, (e) developmental skills, (f) group effectiveness, and (g) influencing skills.

Busse (1992) surveyed employers to identify the skills they expected young people to possess when they entered the workforce. Several skills were identified including: (a) being self-confident; (b) technical knowledge; (c) willingness to learn new tasks; (d) maintaining a positive attitude; (e) being well-mannered, cooperative, alert, and intelligent; (f) good reading and math skills; (g) appropriate dress and good grooming; and (h) communicating effectively in writing and orally.

Way and Rossmann (1996) conducted a national study of 1,266 high school seniors and 879 adult students enrolled at technical colleges to determine how family habits affected students' readiness for work. School-to-work transition readiness was defined as career maturity and work effectiveness skills. Study results indicated that the family does contribute to the school-to-work transition of both youth and adults, and that specific family activities helped family members learn concepts that were key to securing and holding a job. These concepts included intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and critical thinking.

Proactive families were positively associated with school-to-work transition, contributing to the development of learning strategies positively linked to work readiness. Students from “proactive” families with members who spoke their mind, were well-organized, managed conflict positively, and made decisions through careful discussion and democratic negotiation, appeared to be better prepared for the workplace. Both intentional parent-to-child interactions (unidirectional) and day-to-day family functioning style (transactional) dimensions contributed to readiness for school-to-work among both youth and adults.

Individuals differ in their readiness to deal with vocational developmental tasks at the “expected” or “appointed” time. Some youth are more aware than others of the work-related decisions that must be made at various points in their lives and the preparation and skill development required to follow-up those decisions. As a consequence, they are more ready and better equipped to enter and participate in the world of work. Research indicated that students with disabilities tended to lag behind their peers in readiness for the career development process (Bingham, 1978, 1980; Faas & D’Alonzo, 1990; Kendall, 1981).

The Gap

Existing Legislation and Policy

During the 1980s, federal and state legislation was passed to promote and enhance the career development of students with disabilities. The 1983 Amendments to the Education of the Handicapped Act of 1975 recognized the educational and employment transition difficulties of these students and authorized funds to develop a wide variety of programs and services that facilitated their transition into the workforce. Other legislation passed in the 1980s to further enhance the career development of persons with disabilities included the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1986, the Job Training Partnership Act of 1982, and the Developmental Disabilities Act Amendments of 1984.

Existing legislation and education-for-work policy routinely fails to mention or has a narrow conception of the critical connection between family and work (Way & Rossmann, 1994). Some suggested that workforce education policy and practice continued to separate work and family according to a model of family based in the past, an idealized notion of the family (NCRVE, 1995, Zimmerman, 1992). In addition, the differentiation of social roles according to gender and the use of a male experience characterized educational policy and practice related to work (NCRVE, 1995). Unsubstantiated assumptions about the family's role in learning to work were evident in recent policy initiatives. Some of these misguided assumptions were highlighted by Way and Rossmann (1996):

(a) there is little meaningful interaction between occupational work roles and family work roles, (b) all parents have equal capacity to be effective participants in their children's education, including education for work, and (c) aspects of family functioning beyond planned parental involvement in academic work or in specific career guidance activities have little relevance to school-to-work transition (p. 7).

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 mentioned families as meaningful players in education for work. However, family participation was limited to the traditional roles of career exploration assistance and coursework selection. School-based learning, worked-based learning, and community-based activities connecting the two were highlighted in the Act, but home-based learning was virtually ignored or forgotten.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA) focused on the preparation for employment and full community participation of students with disabilities. The Act mandated transition services for students with disabilities at age 16 or younger, if appropriate. Transition services included activities that promoted the movement from school to post-school activities including, but not limited to, employment. An Individualized Education

Program (IEP) outlining these transition services was required for each student. Individual planning for transition services as prescribed in the legislation and accompanying regulations included three components: assessment, family participation, and specific procedures to be followed in the development of the IEP (Patton & Blalock, 1996).

The IDEA emphasized the importance of parent and student participation in the transition planning process by requiring school personnel to notify parents when transition planning was scheduled to occur as part of a student's IEP planning process, and invite both students and parents to the IEP/transition planning meeting (Salembier & Furney, 1997). However, families were mentioned in IDEA simply as participants in the IEP process and preparation for employment was typically delegated to the school or service agency participants. IDEA did expand the definition of special education to encompass instruction in all settings, including the workplace and training centers. However, evidence continued to grow indicating that students' transitional needs were not being met by the time they left high school (Benz & Halpern, 1993; Chadsey-Rusch, et al., 1991).

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Act (P. L. 98-524) made vocational education programs accessible to all persons, including individuals with disabilities. In fact, under Title II, Part A, titled the Vocational Opportunities Program, a state was required to use 10% of the funds available for programs under the basic state grant on vocational education projects for individuals with disabilities (Sarkees-Wircenski & Scott, 1995). Again, families were minimally addressed. Local educational agencies were only responsible for providing information to parents of children with disabilities about the available opportunities in vocational education at least once a year before the students were eligible to enter vocational education programs. The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act (P. L. 101-392), enacted in 1990 to amend the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Act, provided the additional assurance that information provided to parents must be in an understandable language and form.

Recently, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 (P. L. 105-17) strengthened the role parents play in transition planning, providing parents with

full participation in the eligibility decision-making process. The Amendments also modified the requirements for providing transition services to youth with disabilities. The transition-related IEP requirements were changed to reflect the inclusion of a transition statement relating to a student's course of study beginning at age 14. The change from 16 years of age to 14 was intended to focus attention on how the youth's educational program could be developed to help them successfully transition to life after high school and assimilate into our work society (NICHCY, 1997).

A survey conducted by Louis Harris and Associates (1989) for the International Center for the Disabled suggested that families knew little or nothing about their rights under the laws. Family awareness of the laws that ensured equal opportunities to individuals with disabilities was vitally important for the following reasons:

(a) knowledge of the language and intention of the laws empowers families to advocate more effectively for their children and strengthens their ability to participate fully as partners in their children's educational teams, and (b) knowledge of the laws can help parents and professionals work together on behalf of children to make the equal education opportunity guaranteed by law a reality (News Digest, p. 3).

General education-for-work literature failed to examine the question of whether the family had a role to play in the career development of their children or what that role might be (Way & Rossmann, 1996). For example, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994) emphasized fostering parental involvement in children's learning but failed to mention the relationship between family and learning to work. However, special education-for-work literature did address the parental involvement in career development issues. Kochhar and Descamps (1992) proposed a "Bill of Rights 2000 for Youth With Special Needs" that encouraged the educational community to unite in their efforts to preserve access for special populations to a full range of educational opportunities. The "bill" highlighted the right of students with special needs to "expect employers to support parent involvement in their

children's education and preparation for work and independence, and to eliminate work-place barriers and disincentives to such involvement" (p.19).

Research Shortcomings

Shortcomings in current research are also an area of concern. Existing research focused on work life only as the vocational aspect of life with little attention on family life. Research evaluated the role families played in preparing individuals for work was limited and flawed in its focus (Entwisle, 1990; Gerstel & Gross, 1987; Schulenberg, et al., 1984; Way & Rossmann, 1994), often ignoring the relationship between preparation for occupational work and preparation for other life work roles (i.e. work of the family).

Research on the developmental perspective of family life was rarely integrated into vocational development literature. When it was included, it was viewed as a balancing act between work and family, not considering them as equal partners in vocational aspects of learning skills that were specific to particular types of work and family (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1981). For the most part, the influence of family interaction patterns on the children's vocational outcomes was largely ignored by researchers. Vocational researchers tended to frame work-education questions separately from family-education questions, even though the life-span concept and ecological systems theory have been in the literature for some time. Studies have focused primarily on vocational outcomes rather than on vocational processes, such as transition (Grovetant & Cooper, 1987; Masino & Hodapp, 1996; Salembier & Furney, 1997; Schulenberg, et al., 1984). In light of these gaps and limitations in research, the impact of the family on vocational development and specifically, the work-readiness of youth, deserves critical attention.

Schulenberg, et al. (1984) perceived three major flaws in earlier career development research. These flaws included a failure to: (a) address vocational development, (b) consider the family as a functioning whole, and (c) explore familial and vocational changes over time. The

research “failed to examine causal patterns involving indirect as well as direct relationships among key processes and outcome constructs” (Way & Rossmann, 1996, p. 6).

Given the impact that parents can have on their children's vocational achievements, it was ironic that few studies in either general or vocational education investigated in detail how parents themselves view work, work in relation to their children, and their own role in vocational guidance (Rehm & Reagor, 1993).

Career Development Theories and Disabilities

Early vocational development research (1950s and 1960s) ignored people with racial, linguistic, ethnic, gender, and physical or intellectual differences. Career development research and instrumentation was developed using white, middle-class males without disabilities (Brown, 1990). While most of the theory and research in vocational development applied to the behavior of normally-developing groups, less is known about whether the same principles and variables operated with atypical groups. Educators must be aware of the limitations of these theories when applied to people with disabilities. Existing theories have “dubious utility for both describing and predicting the vocational behavior of disabled populations” (Conte, 1983, p. 316). Theories may not be appropriate for today’s more diverse and more equitable society.

Little objective information exists regarding the career development of individuals with disabilities, which clearly is likely to be different than that of non-disabled individuals. As compared with their non-disabled peers, individuals with disabilities are less likely to have a variety of formative opportunities for work, salient role models; and vocationally oriented peer, family, and societal expectations (Brown, 1990, Szymanski, Hershenson, Ettinger, & Enright, 1996). In essence, educators cannot assume that knowledge derived about the career development of non-disabled individuals can be generalized to a population with disabilities (Midock, 1994).

Literature revealed there was a failure to actively apply career development concepts to the disabled. Reasons for this failure include the mistaken assumptions that (a) persons with disabilities were subjected to similar developmental forces and experiences as nondisabled persons, and thus needed no special consideration or theory; (b) the life experiences of the individual or the nature of the disability made the disabled population so different from the rest of society that theories of development could not and should not be applied to disabled groups; (c) theories were too recent or theoretical to be applied to vocational development issues of the various disabled populations; (d) career development was not important for the disabled; (e) the disability itself overrides the individual's other characteristics in determining career behavior; (f) the career development of the disabled was arrested; (g) the career development of the disabled was unsystematic and primarily influenced by chance; and (h) career options for the disabled were limited (Conte, 1983; Curnow, 1989). This prevalence of negative attitudes and stereotypes by professionals, community members, and employers attributed to the existence of these assumptions and hindered the vocational development of the disabled.

Numerous studies conducted in the 1970's examined the vocational development of youth with deafness. They concluded that vocational horizons of the deaf youth needed to be widened through vocational orientation procedures in the schools. A variety of factors impeded the career development of deaf youth including: a lack of vocational information and planning, poor development of interests and attitudes, limited home stimulation, limited language development, poor social skills and attitudes, and negative effects of long-term institutionalization (Lerman and Guilfoyle, 1970).

Theories have typically focused on one of three related constructs: occupational choice, career development, and work. Occupational choice explained an individual's choice of a specific occupation. Career development, a construct that developed at a later time, referred to the process of one's lifelong sequence of occupationally relevant choices and behaviors (Brown & Brooks, 1990). Work adjustment addressed adjustment to the work process itself, independent of the occupation in which it was performed (Szymanski, Turner, & Hershenson, 1992).

For example, Hershenson (1981) provided a comprehensive treatment of the vocational development of disabled persons in his theory of work adjustment. Work adjustment revolved around three basic domains: work personality, work competencies, and “crystallized” work goals. He posited that while these domains were primarily sequential in nature, they interacted as a system. Development or delay in one domain affected the other domains. The strength of Hershenson’s model in application to disabled populations was that it provided a mechanism for discussing an individual’s background and earlier experiences as they related to work adjustment. However, the model does not specifically address disability.

Szymanski, et al., (1992) identified two theories that were particularly applicable to the school-to-work transition of youth with disabilities. They stated that both Krumboltz’s social learning theory and Hershenson’s theory of work adjustment were applicable to youth with disabilities because they focused on the effect of past learning and experiences on current learning and interests. In the recent past, students with mild disabilities were still treated in a “prescriptive deficit model of instruction. Opportunities for these students to learn typical tasks and social behaviors were often denied due to prescriptive curricula and segregated classes” (p. 400). These theories were both developmental and ecological in nature and offered an appropriate framework from which to conceptualize transition strategies.

Super’s life-span, life-space theory was also applicable to this population in that it offered a means of considering the whole person and his or her multiple life roles in transition planning and implementation. This life span emphasis supported the idea that transition planning constituted a part of all education. Super’s construct of career maturity helped educators assess youths’ readiness to make various career decisions.

Hagner and Salomone (1989) believed that the currently accepted career decision models assumed a level of intellectual sophistication and vocational maturity that people with developmental disabilities often don’t possess. Szymanski, et al., (1996) suggested that the career development and career patterns of individuals with disabilities are likely to be

substantially different than those followed by non-disabled individuals. They asserted that research was needed to explore the developmental career patterns of individuals with disabilities.

The vocational rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities involved a special application of vocational development theory, not necessarily a special theory. Perhaps what is called for is not a separate theory of vocational development for disabled persons, but rather a reexamination of current theories in light of the observation that these theories may not in fact fit the data of exceptional groups. Attempts to “make the data fit the theory” are of limited value. The assumption that the vocational needs of persons with disabilities cannot be accommodated within the existing theoretical framework perpetuates the myths and discrimination toward individuals with disabilities (Harrington, 1982).

There continues to be concern about the applicability of existing theories and models to individuals with disabilities and the lack of a universally agreed upon model of vocational development. If youth with disabilities are provided with relatively few enactive mastery experiences, they will be deprived of valuable information for developing competence (Lent & Hackett, 1987). A historical and longitudinal understanding of the factors important for individuals with disabilities would help educators make better judgments about career and training plans, and increase awareness regarding some of the vocational development needs that may require more specialized intervention during the career development process. To apply these theories to persons with disabilities requires that educators understand the theories, the impact of disability, and the interaction between disability and career development. Educators are cautioned to consider the age of onset of the disability, the severity of the disability, and possible deficits in early learning experiences in relation to career development behaviors.

Career Development Information on Youth with Learning Disabilities

“There exists a need for research on the school-to-work transition of

individuals with learning disabilities to understand their career development and the factors that mediate it” (Midock, 1994, p. 2). Little information is available regarding the relationship of family functioning and the career development of individuals with learning disabilities (Cummings & Maddux, 1987; Curnow, 1989; Feagans, et al., 1991; Rojewski, 1994; Toro, et al., 1990). In addition, the identification of career goals or aspirations for the learning disabled population received scant attention in the research literature (Rojewski, 1995). A number of sources suggested that the transitional needs of students with learning disabilities were not adequately met (Benz & Halpern, 1993; Karge, Patton, & de la Garza, 1992; Kochhar, 1998).

It is important to investigate the career development of adolescents with learning disabilities because of the potential marginal occupational outcomes experienced by young adults with learning disabilities, and the hypothesized link between adolescent aspirations and adult occupational attainment. Practitioners in the field not only need research in the career development of individuals with learning disabilities and family effects on career development, they also need research dealing with the integration of the two fields. The work of the world and the work of the family should be integrated and explored simultaneously (Grimstad & Way, 1993; Midock, 1994; Stewart, 1996). By increasing the communication between home and school regarding career development, it is possible that the positive aspects of family influence can be enhanced, and the negative aspects can be offset, improving the career development outcomes of these future workers (Lankard, 1995).

The Conceptual Base

While the term “vocational development” was used for almost 40 years by researchers and educators, the resulting literature contained no definition of vocational development that everyone agreed upon and accepted. Generally, vocational development was viewed as a

“dynamic, stage-based, evolving process that integrates all the aspects of an individual’s life into an understanding of the individual’s interaction with his or her vocation” (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1981, p. 73). Three developmental characteristics of vocational development appeared to be agreed upon and viable: a) vocational development is a life-long and on-going process, b) vocational development is manifest as a series of stages, and c) vocational development is an integral part of general development.

Contextual Perspective

Education about work, when placed in a realistic context, is more conducive to learning since it combines more of the factors needed to learn than any other method (John Dewey, 1916). A context-rich perspective focuses the discourse about career exploration by attending to relevant historical, cultural, educational, vocational, relational, and psychological factors that influence the antecedents, processes, and outcomes of career exploration (Blustein, 1997).

In 1957, Super asserted that vocational development was an ongoing, generally irreversible process, which began early in life and continued until the end of life. He conceptualized vocational behavior as being divided into a number of specific, complex tasks corresponding to certain life stages, constituting an overall developmental pattern. Super’s early work addressed the role of the family, and the importance of family relationship factors in facilitating career exploration. The role of close family connections throughout the life-span, as facilitators of career exploration and parental and familial relationships emerged as primary ingredients in the development of effective exploratory attitudes and behaviors. More recently, theorists have integrated Super’s work into a broader developmental and contextual approach to career development (Blustein, Devenes, & Kidney, 1989; Grotevant & Cooper, 1987; Vondracek & Schulenberg, 1986; Young, 1994). Super (1980) proposed conceptualizing career development as taking place as the individual chose and shaped a variety of work and nonwork related roles in four environments: the home, the community, the school, and the workplace. This attention to environmental impact on career development represented a major expansion of

Super's original career development theory (Vondracek, et al., 1986). Super's lifespan developmental framework offered a more holistic approach to explaining vocational development, recognizing life roles and the interactions between these roles.

The revisions articulated in Super's work presented a far more dynamic and context-rich perspective of vocational behavior than was evident in his earlier contributions. Super developed ideas that had immediate relevance to the needs of individuals in a time characterized by rapid change and uncertainty. He shifted his thinking away from a rather limited focus on the work role to a perspective that embraced the natural array of life roles that interacted with one's career experiences (Super, 1980). These roles included child, student, leisurite, citizen, worker, homemaker, spouse, parent, and pensioner. Super depicted the longitudinal nature of roles that most persons played across their lifetime, how these roles emerged, interacted, and possibly conflicted; and how these roles shaped decision points that occurred before, and at the time of, taking on a new role, giving up an old role, and making significant changes in an existing role (Super, 1980). For example, as people cycle in and out of various work roles, the demands across other life roles may become increasingly complex, requiring skills and talents that can be useful in a number of life roles.

Super gave credence to the significance of context as the origin of influences and factors that gave shape and substance to individual career development. A developmental-contextual approach was proposed as a useful framework for understanding career development. It was argued that vocational and career development could best be understood from a perspective that focused on the dynamic interaction between a developing individual and an ever-changing context.

Ecological Perspective

The ecological systems theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that human development was a function of the interactions that took place within and between various environmental contexts containing and surrounding the developing individual. This

“interconnectedness” of systems represented the structure of the ecological environment. Each of the structures was related to the others and to the individual.

Bronfenbrenner defined four ecological structures to describe the environment: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. The microsystem represented the part of the context that included the developing person and thus, had the most direct influence on the individual. Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined the microsystem as “... a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting ...” (p. 22.) The activities, roles, and relationships were the “elements” of the setting and linked the developing person with the context (e.g. a teacher instructing a student).

Research suggested there were microsystem settings relevant to understanding the career development of adolescents such as, the family of orientation, the school setting, and the part-time work setting. The elements of the family setting were viewed as the “mechanisms of occupational socialization” (Vondracek, et al., 1986, p. 50). Youth learned about the work world from their families in three ways: (a) activities they were taught, encouraged, or disciplined to do (or not to do); (b) interpersonal relations through which learning occurred; and (c) the roles they viewed and were taught to participate in (Vondracek, et al., 1986). According to the ecological perspective, the family was one of several microsystems embedded in progressively larger environmental systems. In this approach the emphasis was on the processes that occurred between and within these environmental structures and how these processes influenced development.

The mesosystem was defined as “a set of interrelations between two or more settings in which the developing person becomes an active participant” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 209). As in the microsystem, the elements, or building blocks, of the mesosystem were activities, relationships, and roles. Within the microsystem, the elements (interconnections) all happened within one setting. In the mesosystem, these elements occurred across settings (e.g. home and school, workplace and greater community). There were several mesosystems important to the career development of youth. For example, the family-school mesosystem reflected the level of

congruency between the educational values of the family and those espoused by school personnel. The school-work mesosystem revealed high school courses that were designed to provide work-related information or work experiences. Vondracek, et al. (1986) stated "... in unraveling the effects of the transitions from school to work, a mesosystem analysis would be particularly instructive" (p. 58). An "ecological transition" occurred when an individual moved from one structure to another and their position in the ecological environment was altered due to a change in roles, settings, or both. Ecological transitions were viewed as occurring across the entire life-span, and included every major episode of career development such as finding a job, losing a job, changing jobs, changing careers, and retiring. Ecological transitions were also viewed as consequences of both individual and environmental changes and represented mutual accommodations between the two (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Vondracek, et al. (1986), "the student's ability to master these transitions may well set the stage for the future school-to-work transition" (p. 49).

Exosystems were defined as "consisting of one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in that setting" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 237). For example, events occurred in a community that significantly affected a youth's career development but over which he or she had no control (e.g. construction of a shopping mall in the neighborhood or the closing of a prominent factory). A direct or indirect causal connection or sequence between the elements within a microsystem and those external events occurring in an exosystem must be established to consider an exosystem operational. Little empirical evidence existed within the career development literature to support the idea that external events within the mesosystem were connected with changes in the developing individual (Vondracek, et al., 1986).

The macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) was defined as "the consistency observed within a given culture or subculture in the form and content of its constituent micro-, meso-, and exosystems, as well as any belief systems or ideology underlying such constituencies" (p. 258). The macrosystem had both a cultural and historical impact on career development. The link

between the developing individual and the macrosystem was clearly demonstrated. For example, changes in public policy toward people with disabilities in the workplace (e.g. Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990), represented a significant change and powerful influence over the career development of this previously ignored population.

Summary

This chapter presented several studies, concepts, and theories related to career development and family roles that served as a basis for examining the contributions families have on the work readiness of youth with learning disabilities. This study sought data regarding family contributions within the home, school, workplace, and community. In this literature review, the first section examined the problems of the changing workplace, adolescent work, transition from school to work, workers with disabilities, and youth with learning disabilities. The following section reviewed what was known about the family's role in career development and the identification of critical work readiness skills. Next, the information gap concerning existing legislation, policy, and research was explored. Career development theories were discussed as they pertained to individuals with disabilities. A discussion of the contextual life-span theory (Super 1980) and the ecological systems framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) concluded the review of literature. In summary, career development was viewed as a complex life-span process whose content and direction were determined by the developing person in interaction with his or her environment. The life-span and ecological systems perspectives were useful for understanding how the family can influence vocational development. They allowed for the consideration of vocational development and changes in the family and broader social contexts.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

This study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the nature and development of work-readiness in youth with learning disabilities from the perspective of family members.

Design

Qualitative Inquiry

As in any research endeavor, the research problem and questions determined the choice of design (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). "Qualitative interviewing is suitable when you want to learn how present situations resulted from past decisions or incidents" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.51). Some areas of study naturally lend themselves more to qualitative types of research, for instance, research that attempts to uncover the nature of a persons' experiences with a sensitive topic (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Since disability issues are typically considered to be sensitive topics, a qualitative methodology, the in-depth telephone interview, was used to gain an understanding of the issues from the participants' perspective. Because qualitative inquiry focuses on understanding the perceptions, experiences, and needs of the interviewees, the methodological approaches are primarily open-ended and exploratory. Qualitative inquiry explores what are assumed to be multiple definitions of reality which incorporate the ways different people view and understand the world from their various different perspectives (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Rist, 1983). "Reality is a subjective creation of a personal frame of reference" (Gelatt, 1989, p. 253). The goal of the in-depth interviewing was to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study, and to analyze their values,

behaviors and interactions in an ecologically valid manner (Rist, 1983). Interviewing provided access to the "context of people's behaviors" and thereby allowed the researcher to understand the meaning of that behavior (Seidman, 1991, p. 4). The depth, richness, and details sought in the interviews comprised what Geertz (1973) called "thick description". Thick description is rooted in the participant's firsthand experiences.

In the qualitative approach, questions are explored without making prior assumptions regarding the critical variables or the relationship between those variables (Patton, 1990; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). An understanding of the context/situation under study was gained through the analysis of unique characteristics and patterns that emerged from the data. The theory used to discern and forge relationships among the words that participants shared with the researcher came out of those words themselves. "Theory cannot and should not be imposed on the words but emanate from them" (Seidman, 1991, p. 29).

A comprehensive review of related literature was conducted prior to and during the research process. The literature review (a) identified previous research and existing theory in the topic area; (b) discovered the gaps in understanding; (c) stimulated questions to ask participants or guide initial observations; (d) suggested theoretical and conceptual frameworks used to guide qualitative study and interpret findings; (e) stimulated theoretical sensitivity by providing concepts and relationships that were compared to actual data; and (f) supplied supplementary validation of the accuracy of the findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Participants

The participants in the study were families of youth with learning disabilities residing in the Commonwealth of Virginia. These families had a family member with documented learning disabilities, age 16 to 22, who was currently employed (part-time or full-time, paid or unpaid)

and had been employed for at least six months. Families were identified through contact with their local parent resource centers. These participants were identified using a "purposeful sampling strategy" (Patton, 1990, p. 100) that allowed for the identification and selection of families based on characteristics of interest. Family members were sought for their "expertise, insight, special information, and/or unique position central to the situation" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 157).

Procedure

The director of each of the 52 parent resource centers in the Commonwealth of Virginia was contacted by letter (see Appendices A1 and A2) and asked to nominate three families who met the study's criteria, and to provide the name and phone number of a contact person within each nominated family. The parent resource directors were informed that every parent nominated for the study would not be selected for participation. A self-addressed, stamped envelope was provided for the director's convenience. Approximately three weeks after the initial mailing, a follow-up letter (see Appendix A3) was sent to those directors who had not responded to the nomination request to ascertain whether they intended to participate in the study. After gathering 47 family member nominations from the resource center directors, each nominee was contacted by phone and asked if they were interested in receiving further information about the study and participating in the study.

Each interested nominee was asked to sign a consent form agreeing to complete a demographic information form and participate in a tape-recorded phone interview of approximately 45 minutes. After the information and consent forms were returned, selected family members were contacted by telephone to ensure that they met the selection criteria and to schedule an interview time. When time permitted, a letter confirming the date, time, and phone

number of the scheduled interview was sent to the participant (see Appendix A4). At all times, ethical and professional standards for the use of human subjects in research as specified by Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University were followed.

This study employed in-depth telephone interviews for collecting data. The interview format used in this study was the standardized, open-ended interview model. The open-ended protocol was used to ensure complete coverage of the transition topic. The protocol allowed for flexibility of response from each respondent, yet maintained minimal variation in the interview questions asked by the interviewer. According to Patton (1990), a standardized, open-ended interview consisted of carefully worded questions that (a) ensured the same type of information is elicited from each respondent, (b) reduced the possibility of bias, (c) facilitated data analysis, and (d) minimized concerns about legitimacy and credibility. Although such careful controls can limit the flexibility of the interviewer, probes that clarified and elaborated on the questions and answers were written into the interview instrument prior to the interview. Probes were used when responses lacked sufficient detail, depth, clarity and further examples and evidence were needed (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 146). The interview questions were carefully designed and worded to allow for variation in participants' answers. The participants' lead was followed during the interview and questions were rephrased when necessary.

Instrumentation

The participant information and consent forms (see Appendices A5 and A6) generated data regarding the following factors: (a) name, address, and telephone number of participant; (b) participant's relationship to the youth with a learning disability; (c) race of participant; (d) socioeconomic status (as determined by educational level of participant and family income); (e) family form; (f) sex, race, and current age of the youth; (g) occupational status of the youth; (h)

length and dates of youth's employment; (i) specific learning disability of youth (as indicated on the current or most recent IEP); (j) written permission to audiotape the telephone interview; and (k) the best time to be contacted. The information form had two purposes: (a) to facilitate communication between the researcher and the participants, and (b) to record basic data about the participant that informed the final choice of participants and the data reported on later in the study.

The interview development was guided by information derived from several sources including: (a) professional experience in the education of youth with learning disabilities and collaboration with their families, (b) a review of the literature that pertained to transition and work readiness of youth with and without disabilities and related subjects, (c) the conceptual causal model of family influences on adolescent readiness for school-to-work transition developed by Way and Rossmann (1996), and (d) the theoretical concepts presented in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and Super's life-span approach to career development. These sources served as the basis for developing, retaining, modifying, and excluding certain interview questions.

The questions generated for this study addressed issues related to the family's contributions to and perceptions about the work-readiness of their family member with learning disabilities in four contexts: the home, the school, the workplace, and the community. These contexts directly corresponded with the four desired outcomes of transition planning: independent living, postsecondary education and vocational training, employment, and community participation (Everson & McNulty, 1992; Salembier & Furney, 1994). Interview questions pertained to the following areas of interest: (a) families' intentional career-related

communications and interactions with their children; and (b) family perceptions about their ability to and responsibility for building the youth's work readiness skills (see Appendix A7).

The participant forms and interview protocol were piloted with four parents of children with learning disabilities. Feedback from the pilot-test participants helped determine whether the content was relevant, wording was understandable, and potential responses provided the researcher with the information she was seeking. The pilot-test results also served as a basis for developing, retaining, revising, and excluding particular questions and addressing logistical concerns.

Credibility and Consistency

The "credibility" of findings refers to how well the findings of a qualitative study fit the reality of the phenomenon being studied. Credibility is achieved by having those closely associated with the phenomenon analyze the study's findings and certify the extent to which the findings fit reality as they perceive it (Guba, 1978). To establish credibility, two impartial persons familiar with families' contributions to the work-readiness of youth with learning disabilities were asked to certify the study's findings. They were both parents of children with disabilities as well as professionals working in the disabilities field. After reading the study's findings, the experts were asked to complete a certification of findings form (see Appendix C1) to determine the extent that their family experiences were reflected in the study's emerging themes and their descriptions.

The credibility of the research was also enhanced by using a variety of sources and data collection techniques. Increased confidence in credibility was obtained through the use of document analysis (literature review), formal telephone interviews, and the written documentation of findings certification. Data were cross-checked to determine the extent of

agreement and disagreement among them. The greater the amount of agreement among data, the greater the credibility attributed to them.

The "reliability" of the qualitative study was defined in terms of the consistency with which the methodology used to obtain the data corresponded to the "canons of good research practice" (Lincoln, 1981, p. 6). Lincoln (1981) suggested that consistency be assessed by analyzing the research practices used in the study. She recommended that records be maintained by the researcher to provide evidence of accepted research practices. They included: (a) all raw data to be analyzed; (b) a log of methodological decisions which influenced the final design of the study; (c) a log of all data analysis activity; and (d) a log of professional contacts that may have influenced the research.

Throughout the study, the raw data (interview recordings, interview transcripts, and interviewee notes recorded on the protocol sheet) were maintained in original form. Activity and decision-making logs were maintained throughout the research process to assure consistency and identify gaps in knowledge. When the research was completed, two impartial auditors familiar with qualitative practices were asked to determine the extent to which acceptable practices were used. A letter of confirmation was requested from each auditor (see Appendix C2).

Data Collection

All interviews were conducted at the convenience of the participants. Each telephone interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and followed identical procedures. With the written permission of the participant and assurance that their personal identities would be kept confidential, each interview was audiotaped. Each participant was given the opportunity to have the tape recorder turned off at any point during the interview. The use of a tape recorder allowed more appropriate interaction with the respondent and increased the accuracy of the data collected

(Patton, 1990). Notes were taken during the interview to highlight important aspects of the interview that facilitated analysis and served as a back-up in case the recording was faulty. Taking notes contributed to careful listening for the main points and to jot down possible questions to use later in the interview. Note-taking also helped keep track of the discussion when the participants left the topic or were interrupted. After each interview, notes were reread to review what was heard and to fill in any vague responses.

Full verbatim transcriptions were made of each interview along with personal notes which were compiled for review. After each cluster of interviews, the researcher examined the transcripts for emerging themes, ideas, concepts, and events that addressed the research concerns (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Each interview tape and protocol was issued a code number to assure the participant's anonymity. Separate and confidential listing of participant names and corresponding code numbers were kept.

Data Analysis

After data collection, a cross-interview method was used to organize the content analysis of the data (Patton, 1990). The cross-interview method involved grouping the responses from different interviewees on the same questions. The content analysis involved coding and categorizing patterns and themes that emerged from the data. An on-going process of content analysis was employed throughout the data collection process as interviews were completed and transcribed. Themes that emerged across questions for each interview were also categorized and analyzed. The material within the categories were examined to identify variations and nuances in meaning, while across-category comparisons were used to discover connections between the themes. Interview protocol items one to eight were examined to ascertain the findings to

research question one. Interview protocol items nine to fifteen were used in the analysis for research question two.

Specifically, the coding process consisted of three major steps: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding was composed of "breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" according to their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). This part of the analysis involved making comparisons and asking questions.

Axial coding referred to "a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories and subcategories" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). The focus was on identifying a category in terms of its conditions, context, action/interaction strategies, and resulting consequences of those strategies (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Subcategories were then related to their categories in ways that allowed the researcher to think systematically about the data and relate to them in complex ways.

Selective coding, also called final integration, involved the process of "selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116). This coding process allowed the researcher to increase the conceptual density and conceptual specificity of theoretical interpretations by using several phases of data reduction. The goal was to integrate the themes and concepts into a tentative theory or model that offered an accurate, detailed, yet subtle interpretation of the research topic (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Each theme was clearly illustrated with quotes.

The *Ethnograph* computer program was used to facilitate the analysis of data. *Ethnograph* is a software program designed to assist the qualitative researcher in some of the

mechanical aspects of data analysis, thereby allowing devotion of more time and attention to the critical interpretive aspects of the analysis (Qualis Research Associates, 1995).

In qualitative interviewing, theories emerge from the interviews, not only as extensions of the academic literature. Theories reach for "broader significance but remain firmly grounded in the experiences and understandings of the participants" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 63).

Theoretical interpretations of the data were formulated that were "grounded" in reality.

Grounded theory is:

... inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. It is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23).

Data were grouped based on similar characteristics and given conceptual labels by the researcher. The concepts were then connected by means of statements of relationship and related themes formed a conceptual scheme. Themes are statements that explain why something happened or what something means, and are built up from the concepts (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). These themes and theoretical explanations were derived from the context and should be considered context-specific and provisional. Restraint was used when adhering to previous research findings or developed theory. As the concepts evolved, relevant elements of previous theories were incorporated that had proven to be pertinent to the data gathered in the study. "It makes no sense to start with 'received' theories or variables (categories) because these are likely

to inhibit or impede the development of new theoretical formulations” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 50).

Interviews and analysis continued until a point of diminishing returns was reached. When this happened, the data categories were “theoretically saturated” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 111). “Saturation” occurs when little or no new information is learned from subsequent interviews, narratives repeat themselves, and interpretations remain the same (Ely, 1991). The information gathered supported a small number of themes and each additional interview added no more ideas or issues to the theme (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). At this point, it was believed the findings were a reasonably accurate statement of the matters studied and that it was couched in a form possible for others to use in studying a similar area (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Summary

A qualitative design was selected to frame the research procedures for this study. The central purpose of the investigation was to gain a deeper understanding of the nature and development of work-readiness skills in youth with learning disabilities from the perspective and actions of family members. Included in the chapter is an outline of the qualitative approach and rationale for use and procedures for data collection as well as an in-depth explanation of the data. A three step coding process was used to systematically guide the analysis procedure. In addition, the methodology was presented to explain how credibility and consistency were established in this study.